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I Remain
your obliged friend
Samuel Sewall.

AN ADDRESS
ON THE
LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF
CHIEF-JUSTICE SAMUEL SEWALL,
DELIVERED IN THE
OLD SOUTH CHURCH, BOSTON,

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1884.

BY
GEORGE E. ELLIS.

ON THE OCCASION OF THE ERECTION OF TABLETS IN THE
CHURCH, COMMEMORATIVE OF ITS LINE OF MINISTERS,
AND OF SAMUEL SEWALL AND SAMUEL ADAMS.

BOSTON :
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

1885.

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"STATELY AND SLOW, WITH THOUGHTFUL AIR,
HIS BLACK CAP HIDING HIS WHITENED HAIR,
WALKS THE JUDGE OF THE GREAT ASSIZE,
SAMUEL SEWALL, THE GOOD AND WISE.
HIS FACE WITH LINES OF FIRMNESS WROUGHT,
HE WEARS THE LOOK OF A MAN UNBOUGHT,
WHO SWEARS TO HIS HURT AND CHANGES NOT;
YET, TOUCHED AND SOFTENED NEVERTHELESS
WITH THE GRACE OF A CHRISTIAN GENTLENESS.
THE FACE THAT A CHILD WOULD CLIMB TO KISS!
TRUE AND TENDER AND BRAVE AND JUST,
THAT MAN MIGHT HONOR AND WOMAN TRUST."

Whittier.

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PRESS OF DAVID CLAPP & SON.



SAMUEL SEWALL.

It would not have been at all a matter out of course or reason, if the name of Samuel Sewall, instead of finding a separate place of honor on a commemorative tablet in this Church, had appeared on the roll of its ministers, preceding that of his son and some others. In his time the ministry was the first thought of young graduates of Harvard, like himself, of the original New England stock, who had a serious purpose for a useful and honored life. Some of his own most eminent contemporaries—like Governors William Stoughton, Joseph Dudley and Gurdon Saltonstall, had first had the ministry in view. Two of these had preached, as had many others, who afterwards found high magistracy, teaching, or other service preferable to them. In fact, Sewall did, once at least, make trial of his gifts at the desk. He records that in April, 1675, four years after he had graduated, he “helped preach” for his old teacher, Mr. Parker, of Newbury, the minister of Sewall’s parents. Carried away by the exuberance of his thought and feeling, he writes—“Being afraid to look on the glass [the sand glass in the pulpit] ignorantly and unwittingly, I stood two hours and a half.” Though he had entered upon mercantile business, he was urged by some friends to engage in the ministry. He remained, however, through all his life, the most ministerial layman in this community, where there were many such. Very few, if any, who filled the desks, surpassed him in biblical, theological, or classical attainments. His library was of solid stock, large

and rich in the learning of the time. Classical works, commentaries, theological treatises and sermons, imported by himself, and especially works on the Prophecies, his favorite theme, engaged his study and profound thought. He loved to present choice volumes to the College, to poor ministers, to converted Indians, and to others who could well use them.

His religious relations in his youth were, of course, those of his parents in Newbury. He united himself with this, the Third, or South Church in Boston, at the age of twenty-five, in 1677, and made a simple relation of his religious experience in accepting the Covenant. He was probably led to this choice by the membership here of the family of Mr. John Hull, whose daughter he had married the year previous. He lived happily with his excellent wife, the mother of all his fourteen children, forty-three years. He says she avowed to him that she had set her heart upon him when he was delivering his Commencement part. She was the heiress of that time.

For fifty-three years, seventeen of them under the pastorate of his honored son, Sewall was in membership here. It may safely be affirmed that in all the brotherhood of the Church, including even the five pastors whose ministry he shared, there was not one to whom the sanctuary with its offices, its divine services, its holy ties of sympathy and help, its work of edification, its benevolences for the poor and the ill, the African slave, the Barbary captive, and the Indian, were more endeared, more jealously, more watchfully cared for, than by himself. He might well have been called upon, at any moment of emergency, to occupy the pulpit. His piety and dignity and high repute would have graced the office of deacon. Humble as was his estimate of his musical talent—and though he confesses he was apt to fall into a different tune from that with which he started—he seems to have for many years given satisfaction as a precentor. Good parts of your church records—births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, admissions to the communion, and special occasions of observance—might be supplied from what he set down by his

own hand, as responsive to the watchful interest of a warmly sympathetic heart. Though his love and zeal were intensely centred here, he was the medium of kindly and hospitable relations between all the ministers and churches of the town, and indeed of the Province. He loved to attend the frequent domestic occasions among his immediate friends for their sober fastings or glad thanksgivings, and was constant with psalm, or prayer or exhortation at the set meetings of a group of families seeking edification in their homes in turn. There was no variance or break, no stagnation or ebb in his religious life. This was continuous and uniform, in his closet, his family circle, the church, the court room, in college business, the council chamber, the town meeting, and the school visitation. His frequent professional journeys, with the discomforts and perils of those days, on rough roads, across ferries, often of icy waters, over marshes and by inner seas, made welcome the restful firesides of friends—with something warming for food and drink. When he returned home from these exposed journeys, he would enter in his record with a calm devotion, his "*Laus Deo.*" His gravity was habitual. Rarely, though sometimes, do we come upon a trace of what he calls a "pleasancy." He was too good and serene a man to deny himself smiles and joys: too sedate to indulge the boisterous laugh.

Some of you may be asking how we know all this about a man who passed from life more than a century and a half ago? The answer, full and true, will soon come. Judge Sewall is better known to us in both his outer and inner being, in all the elements, composition and manifestation of character, in his whole personal, domestic, social, official and religious life, than is any other individual in our local history of two hundred and fifty years. And this is true not only of himself, but through his pen, curiously active, faithful, candid, kind, impartial and ever just, his own times stand revealed and described to us, as if by thousands of daguerreotypes and repeating telephones. His surroundings and companions, his home and public life, the habits,

usages, customs and events, and even the food which we can almost smell and taste, the clothes and furnishings, the modes of hospitality, of travel, the style of things—all in infinite detail, the medical practice, the military service, the formal ceremonials and courtesies, the excitements, panics and disasters, the secret and public movements in affairs, the doings, the worth and repute of contemporaries—all these have come to us through Sewall's pen, with a fullness, vividness and old time flavor and charm, which we might in vain seek to gather and put together from many hundred volumes. And all this comes from Sewall's having kept a daily journal from 1674 to 1729—fifty-five years.

These surviving journals from the generations gone are very risky, sometimes worthless or mischievous, and often objectionable, productions. Sometimes they are slanderous, trespasses upon the rights and repute of those who can make no defence. In those cases, they always reflect reproach upon the writers of them. It was the habit of a class of men of Sewall's time and training to keep diaries, and those of a religious spirit made them the repository of their self-reckonings as under the eye of God, the record of their introspective searching of themselves, their heights and depths of feelings, their unveiled faults and short comings. Some of the writers indulged themselves with more or less of freedom in expressing opinions about the character and course of other persons. Quite a list might be made of men in position or office who, having accumulated masses of such materials in their active life-time, took care that the fire should destroy them before the writers died. A serious question arises as to the rightfulness or expediency of publishing these self-confidences and self-revelations of men who left such records behind them, either by accident or design. The question must be decided in each case by the contents and spirit of the record, if a good judgment is exercised in the disposal of it. The excellent Dr. Doddridge was made ridiculous by his kinsman who published his private secrets. The diaries of Sewall's contemporaries, Increase and Cotton Mather, are extant, but only

extracts of them have been printed. Much in them is wisely suppressed. Increase, though a most faithful, devoted and eminently serviceable man, was morbid, censorious sometimes, and suffered as if unappreciated. The younger Mather was often jealous, spiteful, rancorous and vengeful in his daily records; and thus the estimate of his general worth is so far reduced through materials furnished by himself.

When, some eighteen years ago, Judge Sewall's papers came, by purchase, into the possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the writer had been dead some hundred and thirty years. The MSS., passing down in a branch of his family, had been highly prized, gathering an increasing value. They had been kept with much reserve, sparingly yielding to earnest inquirers the information they were known to contain. Did the writer ever have in view or imagination, that what he wrote in his privacy—never, so far as appears, subjecting even a page to any eye but his own—would be copied, printed, published, and put within reach of all who might wish to read it? We may be safe in answering that he did not. Do we wrong him in thus bringing his secrets to the light? There is no entry in his papers from which we could infer either a permission or a prohibition to give them to the world. But I may answer the question by saying frankly and gladly, that while we gather from his papers matter of incalculable value and interest for historians and the searchers into the curious things of the past, neither Sewall himself nor a single one of all those whom he names, suffers any harm or reproach from the disclosures. Not a line nor a word in those records reveals anything but a pure and unstained soul, a most tender and scrupulous conscience, a loving and child-like heart, a walk in life spent and consecrated as under the All-Seeing and Holy Eye. There are no grudges, no animosities, no malice, no bitter musings, no aggravating reproaches of those—some very near to him—who caused him loss and grief, but ever efforts to reconcile, by forbearance, remonstrance, and forgiveness. Having in view some passages—we may call them *queer*, to be referred to

presently—the question pressed with some misgiving upon the Editors of the papers, whether they should be set forth in print. Bearing in view that such documents are not designed for general reading, but primarily as materials for digested history—the rule is accepted, that the reason which justifies the printing of them, covers also the exaction, that they be literally and faithfully set forth.

The deepest impression made upon me in the pleasant use of the leisure of five years in the editing and annotating of the Judge's Journal, was that of the profound and consistent devoutness of his spirit, and the tender affectionateness of his nature. He was pure in heart, and so had divine visions. He was touched by all the infirmities and griefs of others. Unknown to them they had his prayers, when he heard of their trials. He had his daily errands of help and sympathy to the poor and suffering. The capacious pockets in the outer garments of those days, were, in his case, never empty when he went out of doors. They must have been most miscellaneously crowded with sermons, trinkets, sweetmeats, fruits and other delicacies. Generally figs, oranges, or "Marmalade" or "Chockalett" accompanied a little religious tract. One is a little startled on reading, that on a visit of courtship to a rather hesitating widow, he left with her "Sibbs' Bowels." But we are relieved on learning that it was a harmless tractate, by Dr. Sibbs, with the full title—"Bowels Opened; or, a Discovery of the Union betwixt Christ and the Church." He was the constant visitor of all of his own widest circle, lofty or humble, confined to the house or the chamber. He was the first on our soil to write and print against the enslaving of Africans. His interest for the Indians so earnest, warm and constant, was shown in his administration of a charitable trust for them, and in visiting their fading remnants in their woful settlements. I cannot say whether he would have been in or out of sympathy with all that is included in the "woman-question" of our time. I think he would wish to divide it. But we have an unpublished MS. of his in which he pleads for women as the "joint heirs of the heavenly mansions," and indignantly argues down

the notion of their exclusion. "Talitha-Cumi—Young Woman, Arise!" is the felicitous title of his essay. Sewall certainly had what seems to us a morbid addiction to attendance on funerals, and to serving as a Bearer of defunct persons. Standing recently by the ancient grave, in the cemetery of the town of Revere, of Dean Winthrop, the last surviving son of Governor Winthrop, I recalled Sewall's record, that he "helped let down the body into the earth." But it must have been in pathetic memory of the vanished family of the ever honored first magistrate of the Colony. Indeed, Sewall gives his fondest and tenderest words to his farewells, one by one, till he reaches the last, of the survivors of the first English comers here, especially to those of them, who were "true New England people," and "dear lovers" of this heritage. Still tombs and graves had a fascination for him. As his tomb in the Granary was so often opened in his bereavements, he tells us how, seated upon some relic in it, he was "entertained" by his father and mother Hull. In the widest compass of reading, it would be hard to find a more pathetic utterance than that which this man of station and dignity, when nearly fifty years of age, gave forth to the neighbors gathered round his mother's open grave in Newbury:

"Nathan¹ Bricket taking in hand to fill the grave, I said, Forbear a little, and suffer me to say that amidst our bereaving sorrows we have the comfort of beholding this Saint put into the rightful possession of that happiness of living desired, and dying lamented. She lived commendably four and fifty years with her dear Husband, and my dear Father; and she could not well brook the being divided from him,¹ which is the cause of our taking leave of her in this place. She was a true and constant lover of God's Word, Worship, and Saints; and she always with a patient cheerfulness submitted to the Divine decree of providing bread for herself and others in the sweat of her brows. And now her infinitely Gracious and Bountiful Master has promoted her to the honor of higher employments, fully and absolutely discharged from all manner of toil and sweat. My honored and beloved friends and neighbors! My dear Mother never thought much of doing the most frequent and homely offices of love for me; and lavished away many thousands of words upon me, before I could return one

¹ He had died eight months previously.

word in answer. And therefore I ask and hope that none will be offended that I have now ventured to speak one word in her behalf, when she herself is become speechless. Made a motion of my hand, for the filling of the Grave. Note, I could hardly speak for passion and tears."

If one would have a vivid sense of the doctrine of the Divine Omnipresence, as a felt reality every where and always, let him follow Sewall in his instantaneous recourse to prayer on every moment, occasion and incident of life. He made full, incessant, persistent trial of it—by his own lips and those of others. The oldest daughter, the only unmarried child, left in his home, was long a bed-ridden sufferer, with a complication of ills. His faith and patience were sorely tried by her case. He had summoned successively one by one, all the ministers to pray by her bedside, and he adds—"I think now all the ministers of our communion have been here. The Lord help us, that we may not trust in Men, but in God." It is not often that a bereaved father takes a full grown son after the death of his mother, into the garret, to pray with him on the wise selection of a substitute or successor for her. When he was absent from home, on the recurrence of his birth-day, his rule was to go alone into the Meeting-house for a season of private prayer. He often gives us the themes of his devotions in his special fast days. He left many little books crowded with notes of sermons to which he had listened.

Though Sewall habitually spoke and wrote with an awed solemnity and submission under the mysterious ways and workings of Divine Providence, in its delays and disappointments of human schemes and efforts, yet he drops many quaint hints of his intent to hold a "covenant keeping God" as bound to perform his part of a work, after man had done his best in it. There is even a touch of grim humor in the following hint. Sewall, as already stated, was one of the Commissioners of the English Society for the conversion of the Indians, and most devotedly did he labor in a work which was very dear to his heart. He retained his faith and zeal in it, notwithstanding his grievous sense of its slender fruits of success.

Writing to his uncle, Stephen Dummer, in England, in 1686, he says :—"The best News that I can think to speak of from America, is, that Mr. John Eliot, through the good hand of God upon him, hath procured a second Edition of the Bible in the Indian Language, so that many hundreds of them may read the Scriptures. Lord sanctify them by thy Truth, thy word is Truth. As to the Design of Converting them, we in N. E. may sorrowfully sing the 127 Psalm: Except the Lord build the House, they Labour in vain that build it. I am persuaded 't would be a most acceptable sacrifice to God, importunately to beseech Him to put his Hand to that work, and not in a great measure as it were to stand and look on." Is it possible that if the revering Sewall had completed the sentence with the thought in his mind, he would have written the words—"and not do anything to help"?

Sewall's family discipline was that of his time, regarded by us as severe. It followed the counsel of Solomon. Here is a specimen of it as practised upon his son, afterwards the Pastor of this Church. He was then three months in his fifth year. "November 6, 1692. Joseph threw a knop of Brass and hit his sister Betty on the forehead so as to make it bleed and swell, upon which, and for his playing at Prayer time, and eating when Return Thanks, I whip'd him pretty smartly. When I first went in (call'd by his Grand-mother) he sought to shadow and hide himself from me behind the head of the cradle: which gave me the sorrowful remembrance of Adam's carriage." Genesis iii. 8-10.

And here is a specimen of his abounding hospitality to others than his "rich neighbors."

Judging that the birth of his fourteenth child, on January 2, 1702 (N. S.) would be the last of like events in his family, he makes the following record on January 16: "My wife treats her Midwife and Women: Had a good Dinner, Boil'd Pork, Beef, Fowls: very good Rost Beef, Turkey-Pie, Tarts. Madam Usher carv'd, Mrs. Hañah Greenlef (the Midwife) Ellis, Cowell, Wheeler, Johnson, and her daughter, Mrs. Hill our Nurses Mother, Nurse Johnson, Hill, Hawkins,

Mrs. Goose, Deming, Green, Smith, Hatch, Blin. Comfortable moderate weather; and with a good fire in the Stove warm'd the room."

Here were sixteen professional "Women," presided over by a Lady. Doubtless there was a generous supply of the liquids dispensed respectively from glasses and cups. It was a scene for the pen of a Dickens.

Besides all the infinite, minute and trifling details relating to private, domestic and social life, and the incidents of passing days—from which one might reconstruct the aspect and method and the whole experience of the time from Sewall's journals, they contain matter of prime authority and value to the historian, on critical points in public affairs, secrets of state, so to call them, intrigues, rivalries, cross purposes, alienations personal and partisan, workings of sub-currents, and complicated movements, in the little commonwealth. Sewall filled all but the highest office in the local government, and could look beneath the surface, and interpret some things which were mysteries or puzzles to others. He lived under both forms of administration, by the colonial and the provincial charter. His position in the royal council brought him into delicate relations with that somewhat duplex personage, Governor Joseph Dudley—the man of strong friends and strong enemies. Sewall's son had married Dudley's daughter—a union not congenial—faults, perhaps very grievous ones, on both sides—with temporary separation. The Judge's course in the matter was patient, forbearing, mediatory.

There was a new spirit of relaxing of old restraints, of liberalism, of enlargement and moderation, working in the time; the central object then contested was the control and method of administration of the College. The liberalizing party won in the struggle. Sewall's sympathies were strongly, yet not passionately on the conservative side. But he was calm and moderate. His general frame was that of sadness, of despondency, over every sign of what was to him, a falling away from the old love—a decline of the original New England spirit. The exceptions which we should be inclined to make

from a full sympathetic estimate of the character of Sewall, would not in the least attach to any moral infirmity, any fault of temper, any lack of the most thorough integrity or sincerity, or any side-allurement of self-seeking. Quite otherwise. There was a slightly morbid element of timidity, foreboding and superstition in his nature. His scruples attached to imaginations as well as to realities. He identified the true and right with his own standards, his limited outlook. Yet he was constantly seeking to restrain and rectify such weaknesses.

The most interesting historical point in the life and character of Judge Sewall, is his part in connection with the Witchcraft tragedy. Hopeless and vain it seems to try to set right for superficial readers and flippant triflers, the absurd yet stock-folly which singles out for emphasis in scorn and reproach the little wilderness village of Salem, two hundred years ago, for its share in a stark delusion universal in Christendom. That delusion gave us a score of tragedies here, while there were thousands and hundreds of thousands of them, then and afterwards, all over Europe. The real stress for New England should be laid upon the small space within which the phrenzy wrought its horrors, and the brevity of the time during which its pall hung over our community. Executions for witchcraft in various parts of Europe continued long after they had ceased and been sorely grieved over here. We have no more right to censure those whose official trusts compelled them to deal with that dread panic here, than we have to charge upon the physicians of our day the ravages of the cholera. Much has been said of the absence of trained lawyers and the lack of legal forms and methods on the bench and in the court. It certainly was not for want of law in the case that those victims perished. The court followed strictly the English Statutes, even in pressing to death poor Giles Corey for refusing to plead to the indictment. The foremost judges and jurists of Europe presided over witchcraft trials and condemned those adjudged guilty.

But there are two distinctive and most honorable facts which signalize the history of our share in those harrowing tragedies.

In the first of these we may challenge a revering tribute for Sewall. When, five years after, the portentous shadow which had hung over our community was lifted, and dismay and remorse for what had been done harrowed the hearts of this people, the Province authorities appointed a solemn Fast Day in homes and churches for services of humiliation and penitence. Then Sewall, who had sat as a judge in the woful phrenzy, in his reverent attendance, conspicuous and honored, upon what he calls "the solemn assembly," rose in his seat and bowed his head, as his pastor read his note of meek contrition, for his possible share in blood guiltiness. Did ever a judge in Christendom, even the wisest and the best of them, ever do that, before or since? Sewall was then but second in rank on that bench. His chief was William Stoughton, a man of austere and grim spirit, persistent in what he called following his conscience, the literal word of scripture against witches, and the light which was before him, though it was really darkness. He disapproved this act of Sewall, and would not imitate it.

Yet one other signal honor might well offset—if there were any reason for it—the silly slander which concentrates the shame of witchcraft on this colony. I speak the fact gratefully and boastingly. The Province of Massachusetts, by legislative process, allowed pecuniary compensation, so far as that would atone, to those who had suffered in repute or property through the delusion. Did any other government in Christendom ever do that for its thousands of wronged and tortured victims? It is to be hoped that these facts may soon find their way into the new, more exact and more faithful histories which are to be written for us.

It interests us to ask what was the quality of the possible error or guilt with which Sewall charged himself, and how much was covered by his "Confession." The words of the "Bill put up" by him on the Fast Day, are as follows—the reference in the beginning being to his recent domestic afflictions:

"Samuel Sewall, sensible of the reiterated strokes of God upon himself and family; and being sensible, that as to the Guilt contracted upon the opening of the late Commission of Oyer and Terminer at Salem (to which the Order for this Day relates) he is, upon many accounts, more concerned than any that he knows of, Desires to take the Blame and Shame of it, Asking pardon of men, And especially desiring Prayers that God, who has an Unlimited Authority, would pardon that sin and all other his sins; personal and Relative; And according to his infinite Benignity and Sovereignty, Not visit the sin of him, or of any other, upon himself or any of his, nor upon the Land, &c."

Now we are not to infer from this that Sewall had come to disbelieve or even doubt that what was called witchcraft, a contract or covenant made with the devil, for purposes of sorcery and evil, was a possible and actual iniquity to be recognized by law. Neither the intelligence nor the scepticism of the most enlightened and devout in Christendom had at that time reached so far as to question the reality of that dreadful sin. Among the other appalling aggravations of the fearful delusion which struck such terror into the community, was the fact that many of the accused, under the dismay and bewilderment of the charges made against them, confessed, with details of acts and circumstances, to having had dealings with the devil. Sewall's misgivings are probably to be referred to his deep distrust of that part of the evidence against the accused, upon which the court had proceeded to sentence—known as "spectre testimony." It had been accepted in belief that Satan could empower his dupes in spectral or shadowy forms, to impersonate or assume the shape of their principals, and so to torment their victims when themselves distant in the living body. The further prosecutions for witchcraft broke down under the distrust of this spectral testimony. It is probable that Sewall's sharp self-reproachings centred there. Occasionally, but very rarely, he refers in his journal to painful reminders.

In that exquisite ballad of our beloved and venerable poet, Whittier, so graced with tenderness, sweetness, and reverent regard, entitled "The Prophecy of Samuel Sewall," we read,

"Of the fast which the good man life-long kept
 With a haunting sorrow that never slept,
 As the circling year brought round the time,
 Of an error that left the sting of crime.

* * * * *

All the day long, from dawn to dawn,
 His door was bolted, his curtain drawn :
 No foot on his silent threshold trod,
 No eye looked on him save that of God,
 As he baffled the ghosts of the dead with charms
 Of penitent tears and prayers, and psalms,
 And, with precious proofs from the sacred word
 Of the boundless pity and love of the Lord."

This may all have been as the gentle and loving spirit of the poet has visioned it in reading for us the heart of the good Judge. But it would be distressing to have to believe that he bore such a life-long burden and woe, chased by ghosts to be exorcised only by an annual fast from dawn to dawn, free as he was of guilt. So it relieves us to be able to refer all that is so gloomy in those lines to a very free indulgence of poetic license. There is no trace of any such mournful observance during the nearly forty years remaining of the Judge's life. The Judge, like other devout persons of his time, kept occasions of fasting and solitary self-communion. His Journal records for us many such occasions, with minute and special accounts of the subjects, the matter of his contrite exercises, and the topics of his prayers. But in no single instance is there a reference made to or a mention of his share in the proceedings at Salem.

The following extract from the Journal, in 1708, gives us the matter and the method of one of the Judge's Fast Days.

"The Appointment of a Judge for the Superior Court being to be made upon next Fifth day, Feb. 12. I pray'd God to Accept me in keeping a privat day of Prayer, with Fasting for That and other Important Matters: I kept it upon the Third day, Feb. 10, in the upper Chamber at the North-East end of the House, fastening the Shutters next the Street. Perfect what is lacking in my Faith, and in the faith of my dear Yoke fellow, Convert my children; especially Samuel and Hannah: Provide Rest and Settlement for Hannah: Recover Mary, Save Judith, Elizabeth and Joseph: Requite the Labour of Love of my Kinswoman Jane Tappin, Give her health, find out Rest for her, Make David a man after thy own heart, Let Susan live and be baptised with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Relations. Steer the Government in

this difficult time, when the Governour and many others are at so much variance: Direct, incline, overrule, on the Council-day, as to the special Work of it in filling the Superior Court with Justices: or any other thing of like nature: as Plymouth inferior Court. Bless the Company for Propagation of the Gospel, especiall Gov. Ashurst &c. Revive the Business of Religion at Natick, and accept and bless John Neesnumin, who went thither last week for that end. Mr. Rawson at Nantucket. Bless the South Church in preserving and spiriting our Pastor; in directing unto suitable Supply, and making the Church unanimous: Save the Town, College: Province from Invasion of Enemies, open, Secret, and from false Brethren: Defend the Purity of Worship. Save Connecticut, bless their New Governour: Save the Reformation under New York Government [then with a Roman Catholic Governor.] Reform all the European Plantations in America: Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, Dutch: Save this new World, that where Sin hath abounded, Grace may Superabound; that Christ who is stronger, would bind the strong man and spoil his house: and order the Word to be given, Babylon is fallen. Save our Queen [Anne], lengthen out her life and Reign. Save France, make the Proud helper Stoop. Save all Europe: Save Asia, Africa, Europe and America. These were general heads of my Meditation and prayer: and through the bounteous Grace of God, I had a very Comfortable day of it."

The two most pathetic entries in the Diary referring to the sad proceedings at Salem, are the following, the first being set down four years after the executions: "Dec. 24, 1696. Sam. recites to me in Latin Mat. 12. from the 6th to the end of the 12th verse. The 7th verse did awfully bring to mind the Salem Tragedie." The words are—"If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless."

The other passage is under date of May 3, 1720. "Dr. Mather sends me Mr. Daniel Neal's History of New-England: It grieves me to see New-England's Nakedness laid open in the business of the Quakers, Anabaptists, Witchcraft. The Judges Names are mentioned, p. 502. My Confession, p. 536. vol. 2. The Good and Gracious God be pleased to save New-England, and me and my family."

To some of the wrongs here censured the Judge was not a party. The extreme and ever to be deplored dealings with

the Quakers had taken place just before Sewall was brought hither as a child. But it must be admitted that what he afterwards saw and knew of the Quakers of his period excited his strong disapprobation and dread. He regarded them as arrogant, fanatical and intolerant of the profoundest religious convictions of others. They vilified the Puritan creed, ministry and worship. Their claim to direct Divine Inspiration in the utterance of personal Judgments and the denouncing of direful calamities of fire, sword and plague were grievous offences. Sewall was deeply stirred when they broke in upon the exercises in the South Meeting-house, and in frantic garb, gesture and denunciation struck horror into the assembly. On June 17, 1685, he refused in the Council to grant the petition of Quakers to be allowed to enclose the spot on the Common where the four victims were buried. When a petition was offered in Council, August 23, 1708, to permit the building of a Quaker Meeting-house in Boston, Sewall writes, "I opposed it: said I would not have a hand in setting up their Devil Worship." It may be profitless to ask, as it would be difficult to answer the question, Whether, if Sewall had been in full manhood and in magistratical office at the time when the four Quakers were executed, he would have approved of the penalty. Possibly, if not probably—guided by the spirit of that age, happily, not of our own—he would have done so. He was as rigid a Puritan as was Endicott, and though of a tender heart, he notes with a stern censure the slightest deviation in opinion or observance from the Puritan rule, while an open contempt and mockery of it would have provoked his utmost severity. He would at least have shared the opinion which many hold at this day, that the Quakers themselves are justly censurable because, knowing the temper of the magistrates and their rightful claim to local jurisdiction, they persistently intruded and returned here, and so exasperated the authorities as to goad them to extremities of folly and cruelty which have left the darkest stain on the annals of Massachusetts.

Reference has been made to Sewall as a lawyer and a

judge—subsequently the highest in office, though without legal training. A word on that point. The Colony of Massachusetts from the first did not like lawyers, and would have been glad not to have had one of them on its soil, in fact, clearing off the first one that came here. Of course, therefore, there had been in Sewall's time no means for training lawyers. His own Journal gives us but scant information about his entrance on the profession, or his furnishing for it, then, or afterwards, though he imported many law-books. It may be said of him that, "simple truth was his utmost skill." He had an awful sense of the supreme law of righteousness, as set forth in the two great commandments. The Scriptures furnished a sufficient code to one whose heart was pure and whose eye was single. He followed the methods of natural equity, trying to bring simple common sense to bear as in arbitration and decision. He seems to have acted on the conviction that it is not for men to do what our legislators assume to do—"to make laws," but to discover what are the laws already put in force by the Divine Legislator, and to give them recognition.

So far as Sewall's Journal, printed for a Society of limited membership and a small constituency, had worked its way to a more public attention, the editors found that, as they expected, the passages in it which they most hesitated about printing, have been most readily seized upon for merriment and even ridicule. Let me state the case on its two sides. In matters upon which most men make fools of themselves in the course of their lives—this grave and solemn judge, in all his dignity, is brought to the level of our common humanity in what are called "affairs of the heart." And we have exposed him from behind the shutters. Some of the aspects of his repeated, and not always successful courtships, are certainly amusing. He did not mean that we should know anything about them. But he wrote them down in full, sometimes elated, sometimes, as the word is—"mitigated." The editors did indeed pause over the putting into print the communicative and descriptive details of his court-

ship of Madame Winthrop. We note the warming-up and the cooling-off process. She seems to have first suggested the arrangement to him. But he was ready. And when she was making up her mind adversely, Sewall was quick to see the signs. Her linen was not as clean as usual when she had received him; she kept on her gloves; she drew a small table between them, etc. etc. etc. Now Madame Winthrop was evidently a "worldly-minded" woman. Clearly Sewall might have won her had he been willing to gratify her in two exacted conditions. These were, first, by setting up an equipage at a greater expense than he, though fully able, thought it wise to indulge; second, that like the great dignitaries of his time, he should wear a full wig. This latter demand touched Sewall at a sensitive point. He had an intensely religious objection to periwigs, had written against their use, and sharply rebuked some of his friends who wore them. His Maker, he said, provided him at his birth with a head dress. As it thinned with age, he wore a simple skull-cap—especially in his seat in the draughty and unwarmed meeting-house. So his suit to Madame Winthrop fell through. He turned his attention elsewhere, and easily succeeded. This and other tentative courtships, so artlessly and confidently entered by Sewall in his Journal, when spread on the printed page for our day, do at first appear to trifle with his secrets, and to expose the dignified and honored Judge to ridicule and banter. Now look at the matter in another light, under which the ludicrous episode is, to my mind, not only relieved, but graced with a charm. Sewall had already entered on his seventieth year. He was a lonely man. His first wife, the mother of all his children, fourteen in number, was dead. His second wife had but a short tenure with him of seven months. Of his children, eight had died; five had homes of their own, married. There was left to him only his oldest daughter, Hannah, invalid and bed-ridden. Though the father's patience and devotion were sorely tried by her protracted sufferings, they were never exhausted. Male and female physicians, possets, plaisters and appliances of all

sorts, and the prayers of each of the ministers in town, had been engaged for her. She had a habit of falling down stairs; had broken both her knee pans, and would doubtless have broken others, if she had had them. His house was a forlorn and desolate scene. The edifice was spacious and every way attractive, in the old generous style of furnishing and comfort. Sewall was a bountiful provider, fond of large hospitality, given and enjoyed. What was he to do in his loneliness? He would not bring in and set at his table a hireling official, a housekeeper, so called. He therefore paid his tribute, and a noble one it was, to that wise, judicious, though exacting rule for the order and security of New England domestic life—that every home should have in it a presiding mistress, competent, congenial in mind and spirit, with its head—a wife, and for Sewall's rank, a lady. Romance for him was out of the question; though it has played its tricks with some older men than he. If he had not set about looking for a wife, others would have done it for him, as was then usual in the case of all widowers. Indeed Madame Winthrop herself had discussed the qualities of six available widows with Sewall, who, as a class, seem to have been preferred to spinsters. The Judge, though not portly, was of stately and dignified presence, and of a benign countenance. He sets down his weight when fifty years of age as "193 pounds, net. Had only my close Coat on."

A short reference may now be made to what suggests itself when we take this typical man out of his own time and set him in our time.

My own readings and thinkings have led me to rest in the conclusion that what we call Puritanism—as expressing a body of opinions and convictions, a spirit and a method in conduct and in life, was limited in its fulness and intensity of sway and influence here to two generations of men and women, after which it yielded to softening and reducing agencies. It was earnest, sincere and mastering in the first comers here, and it descended from and was imparted by them to their direct progeny, to be manifested by these in even a somewhat

more rigid and austere form than by their parents. A stern family discipline, teaching and example, the hard and rude conditions of life, labor, seclusion from the freer influences at work in the world, all helped to impress Puritanism on the first generation born on this soil. But their children became restive, non-compliant, indulging in a larger outlook, falling, as the phrase was, "from their first love." In accounting for this, while allowing for obvious natural reasons for it, we have also to recognize the very important fact that all of the first comers here were by no means in full sympathy with the chief master spirits, the leaders and guides of the enterprise, those who had their all at stake, and who indulged an iron will. We detect friction, signs of restlessness, antagonism and strong individual assertion from the first. Only the mastering of the stern unyielding rule of the foremost spirits kept down open opposition. Grievances soon demanded a hearing and a redress. The first spirit of zeal, resolve and dominance in leaders was steadily reduced in vigor and in securing its own way, by a rapidly strengthening force in the number and power of the discontented and the dissident.

This popular fretting under the rigidity of the Puritan rule, compelling its relaxation, was illustrated in the opposition to the extreme dealings with the Quakers, less than thirty years after the planting of the Colony. It is to be remembered that the General Court, exercising all legislative, judicial and executive functions, was constituted only of and by church members, a minority of the people. Even then the death penalty had only a single vote in the majority. The strong popular opposition to its enforcement required a band of soldiery, with noise of drums to drown it. Then the Court itself broke down in its extreme severity. The people would have no more executions. The imprisoned Quakers were all released on their promise to leave the jurisdiction. After this the Magistrates received a letter from Charles II., interposing in behalf of the Quakers. The magistrates treated this royal interference as they always did such matters, with a feint of respect, and wrote the king in reply an account of their annoy-

ance by the Quakers. Unfortunately he sent them a second letter authorizing them to pass "a sharp law" against their troublers, as he said he had himself been compelled to do.

Judge Sewall has been called "the last of the Puritans." There is truth enough in that statement to allow it to pass. Thorough and intense Puritan as he was, he stands distinct and eminent, even among his contemporaries of weight and dignity, as more of a Puritan than were some of them. Taking him as a whole, in type of character, prominence of place, sum of personal influence, we may say that in the generation following there was no successor to him, no peer or repetition of him in the exemplification of the qualities, single and united, which so strongly marked his individuality.

The chief characteristic of real, full Puritanism was in its estimate and way of using and dealing with the Bible, as the only and the full and sufficient authority in religion—dispensing with, and even contemning and defying all ecclesiastical, traditionary and priestly auxiliaries or obstructions in its use. All religious deferences and confidences withdrawn from all other appliances for faith and obedience, centred upon the Bible. That was supremely prized and revered. Sewall's trust and love and awe, his joy and hope, his peace, and also his dread, rested in the "Word." He takes up the Bible with a serene and full confidence, as if he had received it in its English dress directly from the Divine hand through a luminous cloud: so written and certified, so self-explaining, as to be read only with simple and childlike confidence of heart and spirit. It was all alike through and through, as are slices and crumbs even from any part of a loaf of bread. There were passages in it which, so to speak, appalled and frightened him. But I think there is not a single token in his Journal of any suggestion from the critical faculty, any halting over perplexity, still less, any prompting to explain away. It was from this august estimate and this revering use of the Bible, that the Puritans derived the tenets of their stern creed and the principles of their church institution and discipline, fortified by a strong array of proof texts.

Now if any one would have a vivid and full impression of the changes wrought by the silent lapse of time through two centuries in all the elements and workings of character, opinions, believings, habits and rules of life, estimates of principles and values, tolerances, prejudices, concessions and allowances, in all matters involving our own conduct and that of others,—let him take Sewall out of his own Book and stand him before us to-day. Put him, such as he was, to mark the individuality of a man who fills a like place, with like repute and influence in our time. Imagine that you have him resurrected before you, for private converse in a quiet apartment, or to be taken by the arm for a walk amid these very places, while you explain things to him. It would be an all-sufficient way of realizing that we live only for our own time and place, and should be utterly dazed if separated from our own surroundings and associates. Of course, in such an imagined interview and circuit with a revived dignity of the past age, very much would depend upon the mental and moral furnishing, the capacity and staple, the breadth and compass of intelligence and discernment in the man himself. For instance, Dr. Franklin, and his early contemporary Cotton Mather, would look with widely different eyes, thoughts and judgments upon the marvellously changed aspects of things in this, their childhood's home. A pretty fair test also would be found in such a companionship for explaining the present to a man of the past, in the degree of your success in satisfying him which of all these changes have been positive improvements and advances, indicating real progress to the truth and right, the wise, the expedient, the safe and the practically good. But let us confine ourselves to Sewall resurrected for companionship, and after a wide circuit through the city, brought in to collect his amazed, astounded and unutterable thoughts in this noble and richly adorned church. Seat him beside his own tablet. The last earnest act of his life, outside of the Court, his attendance on which prevented his being at an important church-meeting, was to send a most beseeching protest to that meet-



ing. The purpose of the meeting was to provide for taking down the edifice of wood on the old site, where he had worshipped for more than fifty years, and substituting for it the brick edifice still standing, which you have abandoned. Grievous was the pain and lament of the Judge over that proposal. He did not live to witness its completion. Some very marked changes—the most revolutionary, he would have been readily reconciled to. When you explained to him the national flag, he would doubtless approve that we were no longer governed from across the water. Our grand school-houses would have pleased him. The Public Library and the street railways would have gratified him, unless you had whispered to him that they were used on the Sabbath. The numerous bright gas-lights at night he would approve, remembering that he had in his time often gone out at midnight, carrying a lantern, in search of a midwife. He would stand amazed over this whole region of parks, gardens and palatial dwellings, known to him as a wide, shallow bay of salt-water, now filled up to his own farm, at Sewall's Point in Brookline.

But what a racking of all his sensibilities, if unchanged, it would have been, to face a thousand of the features, habits, incidents and facts about this city, which in his day, occupied by a homogeneous English community, was kept under restraint by an austere morality and a power of repression. His hand as a magistrate was put forth against the imported organist for the "box of whistles" in King's Chapel, who undertook to smuggle in his frivolous skill to teach some children how to dance. He uttered his solemn protest when he heard the rumor of some proposed theatrical entertainments in the Town House. What horror would strike him when told that dancing and dramatic exercises were now parts of some of our church entertainments! He sturdily opposed, and refused to sell a piece of his own land for, the building of a church in Boston for the forms of worship of the monarch and realm of England. What would he have said to all these churches and halls of ours for all creeds and no creed—Roman

Catholic, Synagogues, Spiritualist Temples, etc.? He frequently entered in his Journal his delight over the very slight recognition of Christmas. What would he say now, when the dealers in holiday goods work the whole community into a fever of excitement in that season, and children are turned into little highwaymen, demanding what you mean to give them for a Christmas present? Good children in his day had for a present a copy of that grim and sulphurous poem—Wigglesworth's "Day of Doom." You would not have found it agreeable work to have explained all things to, and answered all the questions of, the resurrected Judge. As to some things, be sure you would have had to hesitate and stutter and perhaps turn away your face, wishing your utterly perplexed companion would not ask so many and just such questions. For his part I know that he, the honored, revered and beloved magistrate, neighbor, friend and saint of his day would implore you to let him go quietly back to the scenes, associates, ways and doings of his own time.

Put the truth now plainly and in full force. By the standards and principles which Sewall conscientiously applied to himself and others in his day, a large majority of all who are now living in Boston, would be offenders, culprits, in some form or degree—about some thing, opinion, habit or way of life. As such, they would have been by him rebuked, censured, restrained, put under some disability, fined or imprisoned. Habits and usages, amusements and dissipations, indulgences and tolerated iniquities, all around us, would draw out his sternest rebuke, as in no way admitting of justification, or even of allowance as conditions of real individual liberty among us. Sewall cannot summon us before his tribunal; but there is a higher tribunal before which we are all amenable.

In reconstructing through Sewall's pages the domestic, social and civil habits and institutions of his time, we may fall to musing over this question: Suppose this community had been left to the natural development of those habits and institutions, strictly through its own homogeneous population, increasing and modifying from the original English Puritan

stock, without the flooding in here of foreign and incongruous elements, swamping our own native born element, and introducing here, ideas, customs, amusements, and religious beliefs and observances, which were most intolerable to our ancestors, and to be rid of which forever, was a prime object of their exiling themselves from the old world. The annual demonstrative annual pageant in this city is our "Thanksgiving Day." That this should be so, and should continue so, and should be even complacently enjoyed and gloried in by those who hardly understand its significance—and who take it as a type of the transformation which has been wrought here from the old traditions of our heritage.

It is better that the old Puritan Judge should stand commemorated on that plain tablet, than that he should come back here to have his soul vexed by the heresies and enormities of this present generation. Nor with our enlargement, freedom, abounding appliances and facilities, our compass of differences and necessary tolerances, our broader horizon for outlook, our range in the ventures of questioning thought, even if an element of degeneracy, and a parting from something supremely good, is the purchase price of all we have,—should we be happy to turn back the stream and float to the springs of a rude and toiling life with our fathers. We have no reproaches for them. May our posterity have as good reason to honor, and as little cause to apologize for, us, as we have for them.

NOTE.

Reference is made on page 22 to Judge Sewall's letter to the church-meeting, opposing the building of a new Meeting-house. He requested that his dissent might be entered upon the Church Records, which your late pastor, Dr. Manning, unfortunately was not complied with. As it is a characteristic paper, I have copy it from the Judge's Letter Book.

To the Reverend Mr. Joseph Sewall, & to the Reverend Mr. [unclear], Pastors of the South Church in Boston, and to the [unclear] said Church, assembled in a Church Meeting, on Tuesday, the seven & twentieth day of February, 1727-8.

In which Meeting Two Questions are to be Answered to wit: Whether the Old Meeting House shall be Repaired, or a New One builded.

That our Meeting House needs Repairing, is Apparent: and I apprehend that it ought to be done as soon as the Season of the year will admit.

But as for the building of a New Meeting house, it is now unseasonable. God in his holy Providence preserving this, seems plainly to advise us to the contrary. This is a very good Meeting house, and we have not convenient room to build a New one in, while this is standing. And considering the Terrible Earth-Quakes we have had, shaking all our Foundations, it behooves us to walk humbly with our God and to observe the divine Counsel given to Barach by the Prophet Jeremiah in the forty-fifth Chapter: And to take care that we do not say in the Pride and greatness of heart, We will cut down the Sycamores, and change them into Cedars, Isaiah, 9. 10. We ought to look not only on our own Things, but also on the Things of others, Philip. 2. 4., and beware that we do not unjustly and violently Oust them out of what they are lawfully possessed of.

Besides, I fear the Mischief is like to be distressing, for want of a place to worship God in, while the New Meeting House is setting up.

Upon these, and such like Considerations, I dissent from those Brethren, who promote the building a New Meeting house at this Time, and pray that what I have written may be enter'd upon the Church Records.

SAM^l SEWALL.

Mr. Edward Bromfield, Esq. came to me to persuade me to go to the Meeting warn'd last Lord's Day, and desired me that if I did not go, I would write. Accordingly I writ as I could in great Hurries, Monday being Probat Day. I sent for Mr. Bromfield, and he kindly carried it for me, and delivered it, and it was read."

SAMUEL SEWALL,

BORN AT BISHOP-STOKE, ENG., MARCH 28, 1652.

Being sent for by his father to come to New England, he arrived here
with his mother, July 16, 1661.

GRADUATED AT HARVARD COLLEGE, 1671.
RESIDENT FELLOW AND LIBRARIAN.

MARRIED

By Governor Bradstreet, to Judith Hull, Feb. 28, 1676, N. S.

JOINED IN COVENANT WITH SOUTH CHURCH,
March 30, 1677.

MADE A FREEMAN, MAY, 1678.

Undertook the Management of the Printing Press, Boston, Oct. 12,
1681. Resigned the office Sept. 12, 1684.

Followed mercantile business for some years.

CHOSEN DEPUTY, OR REPRESENTATIVE, TO THE GENERAL COURT
From Westfield, Hamp., Nov. 7, 1683.

COMMISSIONED ON THE COUNCIL, JUNE 11, 1686.

Sailed for England, Nov. 22, 1688. Landed on return, Nov. 29, 1689.

1692.—ONE OF THE ROYAL COUNCIL OF THE PROVINCE.

Appointed by Governor Phipps, June 13, 1692, as

ONE OF THE SEVEN JUDGES,

By Special Commission of Oyer and Terminer, for trial of
Cases of Witchcraft.

— From 1697 to 1703, —

SELECTMAN, MODERATOR, OVERSEER OF THE POOR.

July 25, 1699.—Commissioned by Governor Lord Bellomont, a
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT.

October 14, 1699.—Made a

COMMISSIONER OF THE SOCIETY FOR PROPAGATING THE GOSPEL
AMONG THE INDIANS.

His hair becoming thin, first wore his "black cap" to Lecture, as a
"testimony against Periwigs."

June 24, 1700.—Published the first Anti-Slavery Tract,
"THE SELLING OF JOSEPH."

June 2, 1701.—Elected
CAPTAIN OF THE ANCIENT AND HONORABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY.

Sept. 16, 1713.—Attends the Ordination of his son Joseph, as
Colleague Pastor of the South Church.

June 19, 1717.—Appointed by Governor Shute
JUDGE OF PROBATE OF SUFFOLK.

Oct. 19, 1717.—His wife, Judith (Hull) Sewall, dies.

Feb. 11, 1718.—There being a vacancy on the Bench, he asks,
and receives from the Governor, the office of

CHIEF JUSTICE.

Takes the oath April 25.

October 29, 1719.—Married by his son, Joseph, to the Widow of
William Tilley, her third marriage.

May 26, 1720.—She dies very suddenly.

March 29, 1722.—Married by his son-in-law,
the Rev. William Cooper, to the Widow of Robert Gibbs.

June 4, 1725.—Declined re-election to the Council, after thirty-three
years of service under the Province Charter.

July 29, 1728.—Under increasing infirmities, resigns the offices of
CHIEF JUSTICE AND JUDGE OF PROBATE.

January 1, 1730, N. S.—Judge Sewall dies, after a month's illness, in
his seventy-eighth year. Of his seven sons and seven daughters,
two of the former, and one of the latter, survive him.

Committed to the Hull Tomb, in the Granary Burial Ground.

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